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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups

Statement submitted by the Baha'i International Community, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Non-governmental organizations at all levels have been and remain important actors in support of families. Governments also play a crucial role in this regard, and their active partnership with civil society and the private sector is imperative.

Yet, support of the family is a complex process. Although the family is accepted as the biological and social core of civilization, it is easier to consider its component parts rather than to support "family" as an entity in both international agreements and national policy. Consequently, many conventions and resolutions on women, children, and certain other groups have been developed, but little has been produced on the family itself.

Throughout the world the very existence of people and families is threatened by poverty. Since there is a greater disparity between rich and poor, it is necessary, more than ever, for Governments to be proactive in the protection and support of poor families. Despite commitments for the eradication of poverty by the year 2000, the effects of poverty have

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** On behalf of the following non-governmental organizations: Baha'i International Community, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, International Council of Women, International Federation on Ageing, International Federation for Home Economics, Soroptimist International, World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations, World Information Transfer, World Movement of Mothers and World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations.

98-00947 (E) 210198

become increasingly devastating. According to United Nations statistics, more than 1 billion people were living in poverty in 1993. These people live in families and, in developing countries, millions of families lack access to the necessities of life.

The Baha'i International Community and the other non-governmental organizations associated with the New York NGO Committee on the Family are particularly concerned by the lack of visibility of "family" as an issue during the deliberations of the Commission for Social Development. Because of the integrating nature of the family in its social context, with respect to the focus on individual members and groups, all of the themes before the Commission involve the family both as a partner in sustainable development and social integration and as an institution in need of strengthening and support. With this concern in mind, we, therefore, offer the following recommendations for consideration by the Commission, to be included in any agreed conclusions issuing from the current session:

(a) The United Nations Secretariat should be asked to prepare a report for the Commission at its thirty-eighth session on whether national family structures are accurately reflected in social policies and programmes;

(b) Governments should be asked to undertake the social impact assessments recommended in the report of the Workshop on Ways and Means to Enhance Social Protection and Reduce Vulnerability, with particular focus on the impact of draft legislation policies, programmes etc. on the well-being of families, with the purpose of creating a proactive preventive approach to risk management and reduction of vulnerability.

To summarize, the protection of the family and the promotion of its well-being must become central to community processes. The family is the primary institution of society and the principal incubator of values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. When it is spiritually, physically, economically and psychologically healthy, the family contributes significantly to the development of responsible citizens of communities and nations. It is with this concept as a guiding principle that we would urge the Commission to carry out its mandates.